

China and India's Boundary Dispute Fuels Mutual Mistrust

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China and India's Line of Actual Control

Morgan Aikele- Just last week, both [Chinese and Indian soldiers engaged in a brawl](#) in a disputed boundary area. No soldiers have been reported as seriously injured, but this event is not the first violent confrontation between the armies. [In 2020](#), 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers were left dead after a similar encounter along the same exact boundary line.

[Boundaries](#) are dividing lines between territorial entities, such as places or states (in this case, China and India). Boundaries are useful in a variety of ways for any state. Without them, a state struggles to define its jurisdiction and appear legitimate in controlling its citizens. However, boundaries are much stronger when 1) they are visibly demarcated, and 2) when relationships between the states or entities do not dispute boundary lines. Given that neither of these requirements are satisfied by China and India's Line of Actual Control boundary, it is unsurprising that tensions continue to arise between the two states. The [Line of Actual Control](#) represents the boundary between China and India, but it is not visibly demarcated. Both states claim overlapping portions of control along the line. After the skirmish last week, India's Defense Minister reported that Chinese soldiers had clearly "[encroached upon and attempted to change the status quo](#)" of the agreed boundary, while Chinese Army officials reported that they were simply conducting a "routine patrol on the Chinese side of the Line" and that it was the Indian Army "illegally crossing the line" which stopped them. While there are military forts and areas of political significance to each country along the Line of Actual Control, it is

clear that both countries consider the area a "de facto border." Claimed territory by each state has been fiercely disputed for several decades, and without resolution, the relationship between the two states is unlikely to improve. Deependra Singha Hooda, who used to lead India's Northern Command, noted that any physical encounters, which have ramped up as of late, signal a climate of "mutual mistrust" and have the potential to escalate into larger confrontations.

We can also look at this dispute through the lens of [material power](#), which refers to the "stuff" any particular country has— a strong economy, industry, or army. India and China are two great Asian powers, both with developing economies and enormous populations. Given that soldiers have already engaged in physical confrontations, it will be interesting to see if military might becomes the key to one country taking land or "moving the line" by force.

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